

Baby, You're My Dream in Motion by griZzlyAngel

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Supernatural, Suspense

Language: English

Characters: Dustin H., J. Hopper, OC, Steve H.

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2017-11-09 10:59:01

Updated: 2018-05-31 23:40:58

Packaged: 2019-12-16 23:20:52

Rating: T

Chapters: 6

Words: 19,241

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Steve Harrington knew the Gate had been closed and the Mind Flayer was locked away in his miserable Upside Down hell, but somehow he couldn't quite shake the creeping feeling that always seemed to be at the back of his mind. So, when things start getting strange again in Hawkins, Steve can honestly say he wasn't surprised and perhaps even a tiny bit prepared, nail bat and all.

1. Scars and Scares

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or any of its characters. They all belong to the Duffer Brothers and Netflix. *Please* don't sue me.

Chapter 1: Scars and Scares

August 10th, 1985

"Steve! Come in, Steve! Are you there? Do you copy?"

The static-filled familiar voice was drowned out by the insanely loud music pulsating through a brand new Hi-Fi stereo system in the midst of a tidy bedroom. The bedroom's occupant was currently standing in front of a long mirror hung up on *the* door, dressed in nothing but a colorful pair of boxers and singing into his hairbrush at the top of his lungs.

"-shying away! I'll be coming for you anyway! Taaaake oooooonnnnn meeeee, take on me! Taaaaake meeeee oooooonnnn! Take on me!"

"Steve! Heellllloo?! Come in Steve!"

Recent high school grad, Steve Harrington, continued with his hair prepping as he sung along to Aha's hit single, still one of his favorites even after nearly a year since its release.

"Steve! Son of a bitch! Answer me!"

Steve bounced crazily over to his dress, howling and rocking his head around so that the immaculate mane that resided there bobbed too. He swiped up a hairspray can with a beautiful blonde pictured on the front, shook it and held it up at an angle to his head.

One.

Two.

Three.

Four puffs.

He set the can down and ran back to the mirror to admire his perfectly styled locks.

He gently fluffed a few areas, then grinned cockily at his reflection, crossing his arms on his bare chest.

"Irresistible. You're the man, Harrington. Fuck yeah."

After dressing in a crisp pair of jeans and black turtleneck sweater, Steve was dancing over to the stand that contained his stereo, where he reluctantly shut the device off.

It was then that his ears were graced with the blaring static of the Walkie-talkie radio that sat on his bedside table.

"STEVE! STEVE! STEVE! STEVE! STEVE!"

Steve rushed to the table, snatched the Walkie-talkie and hollered back into it.

"WHAT DUSTIN?!"

There was a pause. "Jesus, took you long enough!"

"I had my system playing," Steve said, plopping down on the edge of his bed. "Anyway, what's going on, Dipshit?"

"Arcade. Tonight. Seven o'clock."

"Uh, sorry, Dustinator, afraid I can't taxi you shits around tonight." replied Steve dryly.

There was a gasp from the other end of the channel.

"Why the hell not? Do you have a date or something?" Dustin questioned.

Steve licked his bottom lip, smirking. "As a matter of fact, yes I do. Is that a-"

"OHMYGODYOUHAVEADATE?! No way!" Dustin cut across him in a squeal of excitement.

"Yes way!" Steve confirmed, unable to keep from grinning at the younger boy's reaction.

"Oh my God, oh my God, oh my God! It's actually happening. I knew you could do it, Buddy! What's her name? What does she look like? Is she hot? I bet she's hot."

"Slow down, Henderson, before you give yourself a stroke!" laughed Steve. "Her name's Kim and she's smokin', with a capital S."

Dustin made some incoherent noise that made Steve lift an eyebrow.

"Of course she is, you're Steve Harrington, King of Hawkins, Big Hair Extraordinaire! You can get all of the hottest chicks!"

Steve's grin only grew, and he was glad that Dustin wasn't able to see the bright blush forming on his face. "Yeah, well, can't argue with that."

"Did I actually hear right? Harrington has a date?"

Steve rolled his eyes to the ceiling at the new voice coming over the radio.

"Why the tone of surprise, Wheeler?"

"I thought you'd become too much of nerd for a girl to come within ten feet of you anymore, that's all. But, y'know, good luck and don't suck." answered Mike with his usual amount of snark.

"He doesn't need it with that hair and physique!" Dustin was quick to defend.

"Mike, you should really know better than to make fun of Dustin's boyfriend." came the sarcastic drawl of Max.

"Shut up, Max!" said Dustin.

"You guys can't deny that Steve has *the* best hair in Hawkins. Maybe

even Indiana itself." joined in Lucas.

"Steve has soft hair." added El in a quiet voice that was barely heard over the static.

"How would you even know that, El?" inquired Mike suspiciously.

"Guys, what's going on? Why are we talking about Steve's hair again?" Will was late to the conversation and very confused from the sound of it.

Steve let out a long, tired sigh as Dustin started to explain, with the rest of The Party jumping in with smart quips and additional unnecessary information as he did so.

"Talk to you later, Shitheads," Steve stood and set the walkie back on his table, turning away before remembering something, and whirled around to pick it back up. "Over and out!"

Steve still wasn't sure how he ended up here, on a date with Kim Jones, that is. It felt like a dream. Fake.

Even though he'd done quite a bit of healing in the past nine months since the whole Mind Flayer shit, it was only nine months and horrors of the like he'd witnessed were most likely never going to leave him, let alone in a measly nine months time. Along with that came other traumatic, life-changing events such as his break-up with Nancy Wheeler, becoming the official babysitter for six scrawny teens, and, oh, being nearly beat to death by new kid on the block, Billy Hargrove.

Steve was a fighter though. He was young and not about to let that crap destroy him. So he pushed himself to get better, to move on and try to live life as he should. Sure, it wasn't easy. In fact, it was hard as hell. But what else could he do? After all, he was a big brother now, and he had to be strong for them. Those fucking little shits.

"So, what's your plans now that you've graduated?" wondered Kim, her sweet, feminine voice tearing his thoughts away from the kids.

Steve looked up from his hamburger to the gorgeous blonde seated across from him.

"Um, actually, I'm currently attending Thornwood Police Academy. Two months in, four more to go." Steve said proudly, taking a huge bite of his burger.

"Ooooh, a police officer," Kim giggled and nibbled her bottom lip attractively. "That's so exciting!"

"Yeah, but the training is brutal-" Steve spoke around a mouthful of burger, switching then to take a swig of his Dr. Pepper to wash it down. "Basketball practice was preschool compared to the shit they put us through there."

"Yeah, but, imagine all the muscle you're packing on." said Kim, her baby blue eyes scanning Steve with a sudden hunger that he failed to notice.

Steve shrugged and nodded. "Yeah, that's true. I can definitely tell some of my shirts have gotten tighter on me anyway."

Kim twiddled with the straw to her drink, watching Steve with heavy-lidded eyes and a small smile.

"How about you? Do you have any plans?" Steve asked her.

"Nope. I'm content for now working at Old Joe's."

"Really?"

Kim straightened, blinking at him. "Really. I'm comfortable and the tips are great. Besides, I'm not a nerd, so college is out of the deal."

Steve took another bite, chewing thoughtfully.

There was silence between them for a few minutes as they both finished their meals, the chatter of the other diner patrons filling the void comfortably. Steve happened to glance up and caught sight of the clock on the wall behind Kim.

7:55 PM.

Shit, he almost forgot.

Steve swallowed the last bit of his burger with a sip of his soda, before scooting out of the booth to stand.

Kim looked up at him questioningly. "Are you okay?"

"Y-yeah, just gotta use the bathroom real quick." said Steve, providing her a charming smile.

Steve didn't even bother knocking as he busted through the door to the Men's restroom, his temples throbbing with an oncoming migraine. Fuck, this was the third one this week so far. Steve locked the door to the bathroom and went to the sink, where he looked into his reflection. He still appeared decent, though he felt completely different on the inside. Letting out a long shaky exhale, Steve shoved his hand into the pocket of his jeans and withdrew from it an orange bottle.

He glared down at the little white pill that popped out onto his palm from it before shoving it in his mouth angrily.

Yeah, Steve was a fighter.

He would keep on keeping on.

He would be strong, if not for himself, then for the little shits.

Even if it meant chugging down medication for the rest of his life. He fucking hated it.

All thanks to fucking Billy Hargrove.

He couldn't have just left him with a few broken bones, a black eye, maybe even a missing tooth? No, he had to make sure that Steve Harrington was fucked for life.

Steve was no angel, he knew this. Honestly, he was kind of an asshole. But had he truly deserved this kind of punishment? Maybe he did...

Whatever, the point was that he would move on as best he could and do better. Nancy had always believed in him, had inspired him. Although she was no longer his to hold, that didn't mean she was not

still affecting him.

A little brain damage wouldn't hold Steve Harrington down.

Fuck no.

Not when he had so much to live for in six utter dorks.

It was nearing midnight when Steve pulled up into his parents' driveway, on a high from the movie he'd just got done seeing at the theater with Kim.

"This your place?" the blonde was gaping at the lavish home before them.

"No." Steve said, puffing on a cigarette.

Smoke clogged the air in the BMW. Kim coughed and turned to him.

"You don't have your own place yet?"

"Working on it."

"Are they home?"

"Nope."

"Then, what are you waiting for?"

When Steve didn't answer and kept smoking casually, Kim decided to take matters into her own hands.

Literally.

"What the-?" Steve cried in surprise when he felt Kim's hand land on his crotch.

Kim did not apparently take note to Steve's shock and discomfort as she kept her hand placed there firmly, and started to lean towards him, her breath hot and heavy.

Steve was wide-eyed, his cigarette clamped between two fingers, while his free hand reached to grip Kim's shoulder.

"What are doing?" he asked in a slightly raised voice.

"Making the first move, since you're too slow." Kim said breathlessly, her lips meeting his neck in a soft kiss.

"You can't wait for the bed?" said Steve, incredulous.

Kim did not answer him, but continued to kiss his neck and hold his crotch, faint little moans issuing from her.

Steve knew he should be enjoying this. How often does a guy get a horny-ass girl like this? Hot and fast. He knew he should be turned on immensely, especially after going months without so much as a passing glance at another female besides Nancy. He thought he'd be willing, be ready. But somehow sex with this girl was sounding less and less appealing.

Even a bit gross.

"Hey... Hey. Hey, hey! Stop! Get off of me!"

Steve all but threw Kim back into the passenger seat, and the girl was looking a mixture of disbelief and fury at him.

"What the hell is wrong with you?!" she snapped, brushing her hair back out of her face.

What the hell was wrong with him?

"I-," Steve stopped short, not making eye contact with Kim as he searched for the right words.

The problem was he couldn't find any.

Shit.

Kim was glowering at him. "You're seriously not going to fuck me?"

"What?" Steve was at a loss now.

"You've got to be kidding me," said Kim, rolling her eyes and huffing as she slammed herself against the back of the car seat, crossing her

arms like a petulant child. "Just take me fucking home."

Steve stared at her, a frown shaping on his lips and between his brow.

Perhaps a couple of years ago he may have pleaded with her to stay, apologize and kiss her. To be honest, he probably would have already been done banging her up in his bedroom by now.

But that was young and immature Steve. He'd seen and done far too much shit to remain as he was. He was growing up and didn't have time for people like Kim.

Without a word, Steve put out his cigarette in the ashtray on his car's door, and pulled back out of the driveway. Neither of them spoke all the way back to Kim's house, which was on the opposite side of Hawkins. Not even before he could completely park the car, Kim was flinging her door open and hopping out.

She swung her purse over her shoulder, heels clacking as she pivoted on the spot and bent a little to look at Steve in the car. He grimaced at the nasty expression that was plastered on the girl's face, taking her hotness levels down a few pegs.

"I don't know why you even bothered taking me out. It's no wonder Tommy and Carol don't hang with you anymore. You're a fucking little bitch, Steve Harrington!"

Steve did not give her the satisfaction of insulting her back, instead choosing to ignore her entirely and blare his radio. He flinched at the car door slamming. He flipped his middle finger at her back as she stormed up her driveway, purse swinging and hair bouncing all the way.

Steve's drive home was moody and dark, and he found himself not turning the station as The Cure's Pictures Of You came on, but only increasing the volume.

"What the fuck, Harrington..." he murmured to himself, pushing his fingers through his thick tower of hair.

Humming along to the music, Steve was just about to turn onto his

block, when suddenly the song was cut off by a screeching wail. Steve jumped and swore loudly, slamming on his brakes. He looked at the radio with huge, crazy eyes, his heart hammering. The horrific sound was gone, but the music had not returned.

Steve pulled off to the side of the road and parked his car. He fiddled with the dials and knobs, hands shaking, praying to God this was just some stupid interference from another station or a faulty satellite.

"Hello?!"

Steve stiffened.

Did his car radio just say hello to him? No, please, no more weird shit, please-

"Hello? Are you there? Can you hear me?"

"NO! FUCKING NOPE!" Steve screamed, beyond freaked out.

He didn't waste a second, ripping the keys right from the ignition, and scrambling to get out of the car.

Steve shut the door roughly, backing away from the car in a frantic, jumpy manner. Automatically, he ran around to the rear of the vehicle, popped the trunk and took out one of his most prized possessions.

He gripped the blood-stained nail bat in both hands, panting and glaring at his pretty BMW that was sitting there way too innocently.

"Fuck you!" he shouted at it, then turned and jogged off down the road.

No. No fucking way was he going to drive that home tonight. The last thing he needed was some fucking slimy portal to Hell to open up in it and swallow him whole. His house was only a few doors down anyway. He'd call Hopper first thing in the morning and let him know, have it checked out. For now, he just needed to get home and wash away the icy cold feeling that was spreading through him with a scalding hot shower.

A/N: So, I'm officially in love with Steve Harrington... That still sounds weird, lol. Anyway, hi everybody! Thought I'd give my shot at a Stranger Things fic. This will be mostly told through Steve's POV and honestly be mostly about Steve and his children, with some additional spooky shit thrown in for good measure. As I've been prowling the fandom currently at large, I too have come to agree that: 1) Steve has definitely got long term complications from what I call a traumatic brain injury from Billy, 2) Steve deserves to be loved by someone who will love him as much as he loved Nancy, and 3) Steve needs to stay in Hawkins and become a deputy beside Hopper. He can't possibly leave his babies to fend for themselves, my God.

Not sure how well this will go, but I'm writing it because I need to, for the love of Steve Harrington, the world's greatest babysitter. Period.

2. Just Another Day

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or any related characters. Rights belong to the Duffer Brothers and Netflix.

Chapter 2: Just Another Day

"So, let me get this straight, you were driving home, listening to music, when your radio started talking to you?"

"Well, first there was some shrieking shit going on, and then I heard the voice."

"And this voice, what did it say again?"

"It said 'hello' and 'are you there' and 'can you hear me'."

"So it was speaking English. Female or male?"

"S-sounded female."

"And you're *SURE* you weren't drinking or high or something and just happened to be hearing some late night talk show?"

"F-fuck-No! Goddamnit!"

It was ten O'clock in the morning, and Steve was presently sitting with Chief Jim Hopper in his office at the station. He'd already been frustrated when the man had come into work late (due to something not El related), and now he was really getting pissed with the third degree being given to him on the matter of last night by the cop.

"Calm down, kid," said Hopper, drawing long and hard on his cigarette, smoke billowing as he spoke. "I'm not against you, okay? All I'm saying - or trying to say - is don't get hyped on something that may be absolutely nothing-"

"How can I *NOT* get hyped knowing there's literally another fucking dimension filled with hell beasts right next to us and my car just randomly starts screaming at me? Like, are you serious?" Steve cut across him in a shrill fashion, brown eyes bugging out of his skull.

"I get it, kid, I really do. But, unless that... *thing* found another way into our world, I can truthfully tell you now that the gate is sealed tight. I seen it. So, I'd rather not go into panic mode unless I find good reason to, and unfortunately wonky-ass radios ain't gonna cut it for me. Understand?"

"My r-radio is n-not-" Steve began to argue.

"Understand?" Hopper repeated with more strength.

Steve bit his tongue and seethed in his spot, looking away from the chief.

Hopper's eyes lay fixed on Steve, scrutinizing him, as he'd most certainly caught the boy tripping over his words a bit too much there.

"You took your meds this morning?" he queried in a much gentler tone.

"W-what ab-about the l-lab?" Steve asked, ignoring Hopper's question.

"What *ABOUT* the lab?" Hopper threw back, brow furrowing.

"Wh-what if th-those creeps are b-back there and doing m-more science experiments and sh-"

"Look, Steven," Hopper spoke low and serious, completely disregarding Steve's objection to the use of his proper name. "I know you're paranoid, I am too. Hell, we'll most likely always be until the day we die. The shit we've dealt with is going to leave a lasting mark, there's no doubting this. However, I'm not about to live my remaining life in fear, and neither should you. You're too young, you've got the whole world, don't let this crap control you. You need to go and do things and not worry so much."

"S-so just act like n-n-nothing ever h-happened, right?! Delete it f-from the p-past!" said Steve, his face reddening with rising anger.

"No. Not at all. You should always be aware and never forget. I... I just want you to try and have a somewhat normal life, okay? All you kids. Jesus..."

The chief rubbed his face into his palms, cigarette sticking out and still spewing a tendril of smoke towards the ceiling. Steve watched him, his anger gradually dwindling as he did so. He felt slightly bad now, knowing all the stress the older man has experienced in the last almost two years since the whole Upside Down/government conspiracy garbage had occurred. He knew Hopper only wanted to help and protect, for more than just his job's sake.

The thing was, so did Steve.

"Hey, uh, Chief-Hopper-I-I understand..." said Steve, running a hand through his hair. "It's just... I know it seems crazy, but, something tells me that even though the Gate is closed and the I-lab is officially shut down, the Upside Down stuff, it... It's not over. I d-don't think it ever will be..."

Hopper lifted his head from his hands to look at Steve.

"Maybe not, kid, but that's not going to rule us. For right now, we're alright. So let's live in the now. I want you to get your schooling done, graduate, come back here and you'll be working for me. And that, my friend, is when the nightmare truly starts."

He gave Steve a tight smile, and Steve forced himself to return one, if only to appease the man. Steve then got to his feet, pushed the chair to the side and stuffed his hands in his pockets. He hesitated before saying, "Will you at least keep my report on record?"

Hopper sighed exhaustedly, smashing his cigarette butt in the glass ash tray on his desk.

"Of course, kid. Now go take your damn meds and enjoy the day!"

It was a Saturday and there was really not a whole lot going on for Steve. With a farewell to the deputies and Flo, Steve left the station feeling a whole lot defeated. The day was hot and muggy, and doing absolutely nothing for his hair. Slipping on his Wayfarers, Steve huffed to himself as he started on his journey back home. He had yet to retrieve his car, and was certainly not in a hurry to do so. Hopper may have had good points in there, but Steve knew what he'd heard, and was not about to play it off.

No. Not this time.

He had been a good boy the first time around, staying quiet and pretending things were fine. No wonder Nancy had been so fed up last year. He hated himself for not being there more for her. It's not like keeping their mouths shut helped much in the end. Steve may not have been a genius, but he was smart enough to learn from his mistakes. Especially now that he had attached himself to a bunch of kids, he wasn't about to ignore stuff. His senses were hyper vigilant nowadays and he wouldn't dare let anymore Demogorgons or demodogs or whatever the fuck find their sneaky ass way back here without him knowing first.

It had been a good ten minutes of walking before Steve reached downtown Hawkins, where it seemed that every person under the age of twenty was set loose and wreaking havoc. Steve sometimes-well, actually a *lot* of the time forgot his own age. He may have been almost nineteen, but he felt more like forty-nine most days.

Sweating his ass off, Steve glanced around at all of the activity, discreetly popping an overdue pill into his mouth and trying not to think about how flat his hair must be by now.

It wasn't until his stomach let out a mighty roar that Steve realized he'd forgotten breakfast this morning in his rush to get to Hopper.

Steve was about to head into Old Joe's diner for some pancakes, when his mind clicked and he remembered that Kim worked there. Kim... To be honest, he'd forgotten all about her in the midst of talking radios and the like. Steve bounced on the balls of his feet in an anxious fashion as he stood at the street corner, searching his memory for other nearby food establishments.

"Hey, Steve!"

Steve just about leapt out of his shorts. He turned on the spot, nostrils flaring.

"Hi, Dustin." Steve said flatly, trying to not appear as freaked as he felt.

The curly-haired dork was mounted on his trusty bike, leaned to one side with a foot on the ground to steady himself. He was giving Steve that grin. The Dustin grin. The grin to end all other grins.

"Morning jog routine?" guessed Dustin.

"No. I'm looking for breakfast, actually." said Steve.

"Breakfast?" Dustin repeated nonplussed, raising his eyebrows. "Why are you so sweaty?"

Steve scoffed dramatically, putting one hand on his hip and gesturing at the air with the other.

"In case you haven't noticed, Dickhead, it's like a hundred degrees out today."

"Yeah, but, that's a lot of sweat... And your hair..." Dustin trailed off, his blue eyes directed to the top of Steve's head.

Steve's hands flew up to his hair, looking as distressed as if Dustin had said a demodog was currently perched there.

"What's wrong with my hair, Asshole?!"

Dustin made a face. "It's kind of droopy... Did you forget your spray-"

Steve's hand was on Dustin's mouth in a flash, causing the boy to squeak in surprise.

"We. Are. In. Public." Steve ground out in a low voice close to Dustin's ear.

"S-sorry, I wasn't thinking!" said Dustin as Steve released him and stepped back.

Steve nodded, hands on his hips. "Yeah, okay, whatever. You know any good breakfast?"

"What about Old Joe's?" said Dustin, pointing towards the diner past Steve's shoulder.

"Uh, no, that's not gonna work." said Steve.

"Why not?" questioned Dustin.

"Because, I-" but before Steve could finish, someone was yelling at him.

"Harrington! Hey, Harrington!"

Steve didn't have to look to know who it was. Gritting his teeth, Steve turned around and groaned inwardly at the unwanted sight. Tommy Hubert and a few other boys that Steve vaguely recalled from school were gathered near the front of Old Joe's.

"Hey what, Hubert?" Steve replied coolly, blocking Dustin from view.

Tommy was standing there, chewing his gum and smiling like a total cock.

"Having fun playing with preschoolers?" said he, crossing his arms. "Seems that's all you can get nowadays. God, it's amazing how much of a loser you've become."

Steve honestly was not fazed by Tommy's words, but more wearied.

"Haha, hilarious, Man. Don't you have to be buying school supplies somewhere? Or am I incorrect in assuming you didn't graduate?" shot back Steve half-heartedly.

Tommy's smile disappeared.

"Fuck you, Harrington!"

"Watch your language, Dickwad, there's kids around." Steve mocked, not hiding his oncoming smirk.

Steve shook his head, making to turn away when Tommy spoke again.

"I guess you're a faggot now too, huh?!"

Steve stopped. "What?"

"Yeah, didn't think anyone would find out about what you did to Kim? Fucking queer!"

Steve's heart quickened and his hands began curling into fists at his sides.

No.

He would not let this piece of shit get under his skin, particularly with Dustin right here.

He had to brush him off. Tommy was a dirtbag. His opinion meant nothing.

Still, Dustin was there, and he didn't need to listen to this shit.

"Got nothing to say, Faggot? Figured. Don't fret, though, Billy plans on taking real good care of her. You're off the hook, Faggot! Hey! You hear me, Harrington?!"

Steve threw Tommy a dark, threatening look, then wordlessly turned his back on him. Dustin had been watching the entire exchange, and Steve could see how visibly upset he was by it.

"Come on, Dust," said Steve quietly, squeezing the boy's shoulder as he passed. "Let's go."

Dustin sniffed and gave a nod, starting his bike pedals to follow after Steve, attempting to pay no attention to the cruel words being tossed by Tommy and the others. The two boys made their way for a long while in silence, and it wasn't until they were well out of the downtown that Dustin broke it.

"Steve, what was Tommy talking about?"

"Nothing, Kid, he was just being a prick, running his shitty mouth as usual." mumbled Steve, looking far ahead of them down the road, sweat beading his brow.

"Who's Kim?" asked Dustin.

Steve pursed his lips. He debated whether he should even say, but

Dustin deserved the truth from him.

"She was my date."

"Your date? Like, the smokin' hot chick?" Dustin sounded thoroughly perplexed. "Why? Didn't you have a good time? Why would Tommy call you a... a... you know..."

Steve let out a long sigh. "Kim and I, we, uh, didn't exactly hit it off, Bud."

"No electricity?" said Dustin sadly.

Steve gave Dustin a sidelong glance, frowning.

"No electricity." he affirmed.

There was a pause, then Dustin spoke up once more.

"It's okay, Buddy, she's only one girl. There's lots more out there. You're too awesome to not find one. Way too awesome..."

A smile tugged at Steve's lips. He stretched his arm out to pat Dustin's back.

"Thanks, Bud. Glad someone thinks so."

Dustin was grinning again, which only served to make Steve grin and feel stupid feelings for the stupid kid. Christ, man...

"Uh, Steve?" said Dustin, back to his normal self.

"Hmm?"

"You DO know it's almost lunchtime? You're not still getting breakfast are you?"

Steve looked at the boy, then at his wristwatch. Indeed, the twerp was right.

"No, I guess not. You know any good spots for lunch?" asked Steve.

For not having much to do, the day sure whizzed by for Steve. Once

he and Dustin had gotten lunch, the younger boy practically dragged Steve to the arcade, where the rest of the gang had met up. Everyone but El, that is. Steve felt bad that the girl was missing out so much, but she was getting close now to actual freedom. Just a few more months.

Steve had lost count how many times now that he'd gone to the arcade since "adopting" these shits. He'd been going so long and so often that he was the current reigning King of Pac-Man. Steve was equally frightened and intrigued by Keith, awkward and creepy arcade worker, whom he caught staring openly at him from across the room with his hand elbow-deep in a Cheetos bag on more than one occasion.

The guy never made a point to come over and actually meet Steve, which the kids only shrugged at.

Spending more than five hours at the arcade was just about Steve's limit, though. Glad to have a watch on himself, Steve bid the five terrors goodbye when he seen it was a quarter to six, and strutted out of the door, but not before making them all promise to walkie him later to let him know that they all got home safe. Of course, there was no worry with regards to Will, because Joyce was picking him up.

It was a stark contrast going outside to the pandemonium of the arcade inside. Besides the random car or two that whizzed by and the tweeting of birds, it was remarkably quiet. The sun was heading towards the West, but there was still a good amount of daylight left to make it back home from here on foot. Steve was happy to note that the heat of the day had subsided considerably. Rounding the corner onto the street his house was located on sometime later, Steve's heart quickened at the sight of his car.

It still sat there, unassuming and lifeless.

Steve took his keys out of his shorts' pocket as he cautiously approached the vehicle, breathing hard through his nose. He needed to get a grip. All he had to do was drive it a couple of feet to his driveway. That's it. That's all.

Unlocking the door, Steve carefully opened it and took an uneasy breath before sliding inside. It was insufferably stuffy from enduring the sizzling sun all day, and Steve hurriedly rolled the window down to gasp for fresh air. With apprehension, Steve stuck the key into the ignition and rolled it. The car came to life-

"-DANCE ALL NIGHT AND GET REAL LOOSE! YOU DON'T NEED NO BAD EXCUSE-"

"HOLYSHITFUCK!" Steve cried in fright at the blasting radio.

Hair on end, Steve turned The Cars off with more force than necessary, clutching at his chest.

Well, at least it wasn't trying to have a conversation this time. Thank God...

Making it home without any issue, Steve parked and hopped out of his car, and headed up the driveway to his house. His parents had still not come back from that conference in Denver.

Like it even mattered anymore.

Within a few more weeks Steve would have enough money saved to go buy an apartment of his own and start an actual adult life. It was exciting, and the more Steve thought about it, the more impatient he became. Shit, if he had to stomach his father much more longer...

Stepping up to the front door, Steve was about to enter the house, when he thought he heard someone running behind him. The boy whirled around on his doorstep, instinctively dropping into a defensive stance. He relaxed when he saw it was just someone jogging down the street.

A girl, dressed in standard exercise getup, with blinding-white sneakers and hair that was pulled back into a springy ponytail.

Steve shook his head at his feet.

He *really* needed to get a grip.

Biting his lip, Steve turned to face his door once again, his mind

buzzing with all sorts of thoughts as he unlocked it and crossed the threshold into the huge, empty house.

It was lucky that he failed to notice the headlights of his car come on suddenly, or the radio turn on with an otherworldly screech, followed with a soft, feminine voice speaking to the silence-

"He's coming."

A/N: I tried to make this chapter not so much of a filler, so hopefully it turned out okay. Not much to note on. Some recommended music when reading: 'She Wants Me to Find Her', 'Walkin in Hawkins', both obviously from ST2 OST, and 'Outside the Realm' by BIG GIANT CIRCLES - which was featured in ST2, but not actually orchestrated by Kyle Dixon and Michael Stein. More to come soon! Stay tuned, kids!

3. Contact

A/N: Hello again! Things start getting stranger this chapter, so be warned! But, really, if anyone is triggered by sexual content or abuse, just know that there is a tiny, TINY bit of that in this chapter towards the end. I also realized that I never gave credit for my story title, 'Baby, You're My Dream in Motion', which is a lyric that comes from Billy Ocean's 'Loverboy'. A nice little 80s pop song if you've never heard it. Not much else to note.

Recommended music for reading (AKA, the stuff I listened to while writing this chapter):

'Act of War' by Elton John and Millie Jackson

'Friendship' by Kyle Dixon and Michael Stein, from ST1

'Take My Heart' by Corey Hart

'Presumptuous' by Kyle Dixon and Michael Stein, from ST2

'The Upside Down' by Kyle Dixon and Michael Stein, from ST1

'Adult Education' by Daryl Hall and John Oates

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or any of its related characters. They belong to the Duffer Brothers and Netflix.

Chapter 3: Contact

September 6th, 1985

POP! POP! POP!

When the sleek, ebony Beretta in Steve's gloved hands had spat its last bullet, he lowered it, and admired his handiwork. The human-shaped target positioned in front of him some 20 to 25 yards away contained a few missed marks, though most had hit the center mass dead on. Making sure to put on the safety before anything else, Steve

holstered his gun, then dropped his protective ear muffs to hang about his neck. A hand landed on his shoulder just then, followed by a cheerful female voice.

"Nice job, Harrington!"

"Thanks, Cindy. Finally starting to show some improvement." said Steve, taking off his protective glasses as he turned to face the girl.

"Knew you would. Just takes time and practice." said Cindy with a bright smile.

Steve smiled back. He really liked Cindy a lot. She was a tall, lean girl close to his age, with a sharp bob of platinum blonde hair and the spirit of a lion. The two were classmates in the program here at Thornwood, and had grown to be good friends since the start. Cindy was not from Hawkins, but the neighboring city of Bergrin. She was the only girl in their class, but she held her own remarkably, garnering much respect from her male companions, including Steve. Though Steve thought she was pretty, and would've perhaps found a career in modeling if she'd tried, Cindy was tough and smart, and not to be fooled with. Not unlike Nancy in many respects.

"Ready for the test on Monday?" asked Steve, heading back up the walkway to the school with the girl.

"Hell yeah. You?" Cindy was almost hopping beside him, she was so energetic.

"Ready as I'll ever be." Steve chuckled.

Cindy shoved him lightly. "Hey, what kind of attitude is that?"

"I suck at testing, Cindy. Always have. I'm better at the physical stuff, you know? Like, just give me the job and I'll do it. Plain and simple." said Steve.

"Well, forget the test for now," Cindy said, giving his arm a playful pinch. "What are you up to this weekend?"

Steve was not expecting her to ask that question. He was taken aback, to be honest. What was he supposed to tell her? That it was

his birthday, and instead of a getting wasted with people his own age, he was going to be hanging out with a bunch of high school freshmen? Sure, he'd see Nancy and Jonathan, but they would be connected at the hip and he the classic third wheel. Things were far less awkward now, but still...

"I'm, uh, taking the nerds to see Teen Wolf tonight, and the rest of the weekend I'm helping with some remodeling of a friend's house. So, I'll be busy." answered Steve truthfully, omitting the birthday part.

"That's so sweet!" said Cindy in a high-pitched tone.

"What?" Steve looked at her with a quirked eyebrow.

"You and those kids. I think it's sweet what you do for them." Cindy explained.

"Oh, well, they're great kids, you know? Total nerds, but they rub off on you. A lot." said Steve.

The two trainees relieved their gear and guns to the appropriate secured areas designated to each of them inside the school, showered and dressed in regular clothing before leaving for the day, at which time Cindy caught Steve's arm before he could head to his car.

Steve stopped and looked around at her, his brown eyes quizzical.

Cindy was chewing her lip in what seemed like nervousness, then spoke rather fast. "You know, anytime you want some company other than the nerds, I'm just a ring away. You're too awesome to be alone, Steve Harrington."

And then she had stuffed a piece of paper in his hand, kissed his cheek, and sprung away like a spooked deer, leaving Steve speechless in the middle of the parking lot.

Once he'd gotten over the shock, Steve opened his hand to look at the paper Cindy had put there. It was folded up tight. Steve unfolded it and was not so surprised to see what was scribbled in the middle of it.

Call me when you're ready!

Cindy

A smile was curling up Steve's lips as he read the name on the paper, and he looked up just in time to catch Cindy waving out her window at him as she drove away in her cute little yellow Volkswagen.

Steve placed Cindy's number in his jeans' pocket and made his way to his car.. Coming to halt at the drivers side door, Steve checked the time on his watch. It was a quarter to four. The movie didn't start until seven tonight, so he still had some time to drop that paint by the Byers. What he had said to Cindy earlier was completely true about remodeling a friend's house, that friend being the Byers family. Hopper had come to Steve with the idea back a couple of weeks ago when Steve had been over for dinner with him and El at the cabin.

It was obvious the chief had a huge thing for Joyce, and after all the shit that had gone down in her home, he wanted to just fix everything for her, make it brand new. Of course, he could not have done it with just he and Jonathan alone, so Steve had been recruited.

Steve was more than happy to help. Not only did he like Joyce immensely (she was the motherly mother he never had), but the job gave him more to do on the weekends besides hanging at the arcade. Which wasn't entirely a bad thing as he had discovered, but Steve knew it was starting to look odd for a guy out of high school playing Pac-man for hours on a Saturday.

Getting into his car, Steve began wondering if he should have just told Cindy about his birthday and invited her over. She knew about the kids from him, and she sounded like she liked the kids without even truly meeting them yet, so it's not like she'd be walking into something unknown. It wasn't going to be a hardcore party with shots and make-out sessions on a sofa. More like pizza and watching Empire Strikes Back. Crazy thing was, Steve was satisfied with the latter. Even looking forward to it, because those shits were pretty much his world anymore. However, he couldn't speak for Cindy. Although she came off as the type of girl who would be up for anything, he wasn't so sure how much she'd really enjoy partying with him and a bunch of fourteen year old dorks for a whole evening.

Not to mention, he had not said a word to the kids about Cindy. Lord knows they would have the two of them pegged as a couple and planning their honeymoon to Hawaii.

Or at least Dustin would.

It suddenly dawned on Steve that he thought of being a couple with Cindy like it was some weird, far-fetched notion.

Steve let the thought sink in and he realized that it was indeed more likely than he gave credit to.

Especially considering she had presented him with her phone number.

Inviting him to call her whenever he was up to it.

Cindy was gorgeous, fit, funny and smart. She was into him, he supposed, though unlike Kim, she was not pushing herself on him. She offered her hand to him in faith that he would take it on his own.

But, would he?

Sure, it would be what was expected, even though it may not have been what he wanted.

"Fuck me." Steve muttered, firing the engine up.

His confused thoughts regarding Cindy diminished for the time he was driving back to Hawkins, on edge the entire way. Nearly a month had gone by since Steve's car radio had spoken to him, and even though he felt better, there was that one tiny part of him that knew it was no fluke. Due to this, Steve would no longer listen to his radio and drove with his windows down to disturb the sinking silence somewhat.

Subsequent to delivering the paint to the Byers, where Joyce had insisted he stay for a bit to have some homemade rice crispy treats with her and Will, Steve went to the Henderson house to chill with Dustin for a bit before going to the movie. Mrs. Henderson was currently out grocery shopping, so Dustin had the place to himself.

"So, first week of high school," said Steve, lounging on the sofa and petting Tews, who was curled up in his lap. "What do you think?"

"It was amazing!" Dustin gushed from the kitchen, where he was at the moment making a bologna sandwich. "Apart from Mr. Clark, high school is way better than middle school. You have more clubs, more teachers, better food, and the girls even seem less bitchy. Tammy Hoyer literally complimented my hair today, Steve! She said it was awesome! Can you believe it?!"

"Of course I can, because your hair IS awesome, Dipshit."

Steve was beyond thrilled to hear the kid's positive reaction, especially since Dustin had quite literally driven himself to be sick a few times from severe anxiety the week prior to the gang's start of freshman year at Hawkins High. Steve had gone with Dustin to buy school supplies on the boy's eager request, to which Miss Henderson reluctantly relinquished the activity with a solid forty dollars given to Steve for anything her son needed. The two boys gathered the basics, such as notepads, folders, pencils and a new backpack, but as Dustin was chattering over whether he should purchase sticky notes or not, Steve had been studying the younger boy's clothing.

Dustin had gotten good at styling his curly mane in the time since Steve had taught him the trick. So good, in fact, the boy was rarely seen in public without it fixed to absolute perfection anymore. However, good hair was not a stand alone. That is why Steve knew he had to give his buddy some pointers on fashion as well. Dustin was unsure when Steve offered to purchase him some new clothes for school, as he felt most comfortable in his favorite baggy T-shirts and jeans. Steve eventually convinced him that he'd look great in a new pair of Nikes and Members Only jacket.

At the end of the day, Steve had spent well over two hundred dollars on clothes for Dustin, but he did not regret a dime of it, because the kid was just so fucking happy.

Although Dustin dressed like a person ready to face the world, he lacked a lot of the confidence to back up his image. Steve must have received at least a dozen late night calls from a tearful Dustin all the way up to the day school was in session, where the boy had confessed

to being scared and even puking from the rising anxiety inside of him.

Now here Steve sat, watching the same boy practically dance his way into the living room, holding aloft a plate containing his bologna sandwich, an enormous grin on his face. He was wearing a pair of fit, light blue jeans (similar to a few Steve owned), a purple Lacoste sweater and his hair was towering high.

"So, who is this Tammy Hoyer?" inquired Steve, smirking at Dustin's slick moves.

Dustin sat down next to Steve, picking up his sandwich.

"A girl."

"No shit, I meant who is she to YOU?" said Steve.

"If you're trying to ask me if I have a crush on her, then the answer is maybe in the future sometime." said Dustin smartly, biting into his sandwich.

"What in the hell is that supposed to mean?" said Steve with a frown, scratching behind Tews' ear.

Dustin shrugged, chewing fast and swallowing hard.

"She has braces."

Steve gave Dustin a confused look. "So?"

"So, braces are gross." answered Dustin simply, taking another bite of the sandwich.

"Gross?" Steve echoed, bemused.

"Dif I stuffer?" said Dustin through a mouthful.

Steve scoffed. "Dude, that's kind of dickish."

"Hey, she's pretty behind them, I know, it's just that braces make your breath smell, and I'm really not up to making out with a girl-"

"Whoa, whoa, whoa," Steve interrupted Dustin, his rise in tone causing Tews to sit up. "Who said anything about making out?"

Dustin rolled his eyes at Steve. "Dude, please, don't act so innocent."

"Look, Dickhead, for one thing, girls with braces are cute as hell. Second, you literally just started high school! What the fuck are you thinking of making out all of a sudden?! I mean, don't you have homework or something?" said Steve, quite frenzied and not noticing Tews leaping out of his arms.

"You have a thing for braces, Steve?" asked Dustin, snickering.

Steve scowled at him, then quick as lightening his arm shot out and he snatched the sandwich from right under Dustin's nose.

"Hey! What the fuck, Steve?!" Dustin whined.

"Language." reminded Steve, standing and stuffing the rest of the sandwich in his mouth.

He messed Dustin's hair as he sauntered past him towards the kitchen, earning a slap on the wrist from the boy. Steve almost choked on a laugh that came up his throat as he chewed the sandwich, careful not to trip over Tews, who was padding in front of him, on a mission to her food and water bowls.

"Hey, you wanna know something weird?" Dustin said, bringing his empty plate to the kitchen sink.

"Besides your face?" said Steve, fetching a glass from the cupboard.

"Ha ha, funny, Asshole," Dustin said, rinsing his plate. "No, so Mike and I were talking on the walkie last night, right? Usual campaign discussion stuff and such. Well, during our conversation there was some major interference. It was freaky as shit-like some demon screeching over the walkie."

Steve froze, holding his glass under the cold running water at the sink.

"Demon screeching?"

"Yeah, but what's even weirder was that was not the only thing we heard," said Dustin, turning to Steve, clearly excited by the story he was recounting. "There was this girl's voice. At first we thought it was El, it was so soft.."

"How did you know it wasn't El?" asked Steve, beginning to feel panic blossoming inside him.

"She sounded older, and just different." said Dustin.

Steve was sweating, his heart racing in his chest.

"What did she say?" he questioned, trying to sound normal and hide his escalating dread.

"Lots of things, though she didn't always make sense. It's like we were only hearing snippets. I don't remember everything, but it was stuff like 'be ready', 'found a way', 'have to hurry' and 'she needs our help'. I don't know, Steve, it was like she was really trying to tell us something. Her voice was full of fear, and-Steve? Steve!"

Steve startled at Dustin's clap in the face.

"I think your glass is full." Dustin told him, pointing at the sink.

"Huh?" Steve looked over and realized he was still holding his glass under the running faucet, and it was overflowing like a mini waterfall in his hand. "Oh..."

Dustin eyed Steve while he gulped down the water over the sink, slight concern wrinkling his brow.

"Are you okay?" he asked.

Steve set the glass in the sink, breathing heavily, then glanced at Dustin, his lips wet and dripping water.

"Y-yeah."

Dustin only continued looking concerned.

Steve pushed himself away from the sink, swiping the back of his

hand across his mouth.

He walked over to the kitchen table and took a seat, or rather he dropped down into one of the chairs unceremoniously. Steve then closed his eyes and rubbed the sides of his head, trying to ward off the impending migraine.

This could not seriously be happening... Not again... And to his fucking little shits? It made him livid just thinking of the that thing interacting with Dustin. Son of a bitch. Fucking fuck-

"Steve?" said Dustin quietly next to him.

"Yeah, Bud?" Steve replied in a strained voice.

"Are you sure you're okay?"

Steve felt Dustin's hand on his shoulder, warm and comforting.

Steve lifted his head to look around at the boy, putting on a fake-as-shit smile.

"I'm sure. I'm just having one of my migraines."

Dustin's blue eyes widened. "Did I trigger it?"

"No! Not at all," Steve assured him firmly, playfully poking Dustin in the stomach. "They come and go as they please."

"Did you forget your meds again?" Dustin questioned suspiciously, folding his arms.

Steve sighed, wearied. He's heard this way too much lately.

"No, Dustin. Stop worrying, okay? I'm fine, really," said Steve, his eyes flitting to the clock on the wall. "We better get going and pick up the others.. Don't want to miss Michael J. Fox, do we?"

"Mmmm-ooohhh yeah, yes, harder, harder! Uh, uh!"

The blonde moaned and whined as she threw her head back, gripping

the pillows beneath her, trying to keep steady as her partner presently mounted to her backside was slamming into her so violently the bed was in danger of collapsing.

"Shut up." the male growled low, tightening his grasp on her hips.

"Feels so good-"

"I said shut up!"

The blonde cried out when her partner grabbed a handful of her hair and yanked her head back roughly, thrusting harder than before. The bed frame was knocking loudly against the wall with the wild activity. Female whimpers and male grunts of pleasure filled the dark bedroom. Finally, with a crazed scream at the release of pure ecstasy, the two fell apart and became quiet.

"Wow, that was something else." the woman breathed.

The man had already switched on the lamp, retrieved a cigarette and lighter from the bedside table and was sucking on it. He said nothing. The blonde woman rolled onto her side to face her partner.

"I'm one lucky bitch to have Billy Hargrove in bed." she purred, running a finger along his arm.

Billy snorted, pulling the cigarette out from his lips. "Got that right."

"You must feel pretty lucky to have Kim Jones, best lips and hands in Hawkins."

"Don't be so full of yourself." muttered Billy, drawing on the cigarette once more.

Kim watched him in the dim light, nibbling her bottom lip thoughtfully. When he had pulled the cigarette away from his mouth for a second time, Kim went to pluck it from his fingers, not expecting his other hand to whip out and lock around her wrist like a vice.

Kim gasped in pain as Billy sat up in bed, tugging at her arm.

"What the fuck are you doing?" Billy snarled.

"I j-just wanted a turn!" cried Kim.

"What the fuck makes you think I want to share with you?" said Billy, his knuckles white from squeezing her wrist so tight.

Kim had tears now spilling down her cheeks. "Please! You're hurting me! L-let go!"

Billy rolled his eyes and loosened his grip so that she could take her arm back. He ignored Kim's sniffing, stuck his cigarette in between his lips and returned to his previous position.

"Christ, would you stop?! I barely touched you," said Billy after Kim had been crying quietly for a few minutes. "Make yourself useful and go get the beer out of my car."

Kim slowly turned to look at him, lips quivering.

"Well? Go get the beer!" Billy ordered hotly.

Kim frightfully scrambled out of her bed. She slipped on her robe that was hanging on the back of her bedroom door, then left Billy alone to puff on his cigarette while she went to fetch the beer.

Outside the night was cool with a light breeze rustling the leaves of the trees that sprinkled the neighborhood. Kim stomped down the front porch steps and across the tiny lawn to Billy's infamous Camaro, tears still leaking from her eyes. She was both sad and pissed, having expected the evening to go a lot more different. Coming to the passenger side door, Kim swung it open none too gently. She bent and fished for the beer in the back, swearing under her breath. At last she had it. With a groan, Kim picked up the huge pack, using her foot to shut the door.

As she stood and shook her blonde locks out of her face, she let out a squeal of surprise when she spotted someone watching her from the opposite side of the street. Although the street-lamps were weak, they provided just enough light to make out the features of a short, skinny girl with a wild mane of long, dark curls.

Kim was most horrified to see that she was very much nude.

"What the hell are you doing?!" Kim shouted at her.

The girl said not a word, but Kim sensed she wanted, or needed something. Thoughts whirled in Kim's head. Foggy, yet clear in a way. She felt the inclination to disrobe, although that was ridiculous. Right?

Kim hugged the pack of beer to her chest, taking a step back.

"I swear to God, I'll call the fucking police, Bitch!" said Kim, the threat sizzling out on the tip of her tongue.

Before Kim knew what she was doing, she had dropped the beer to the ground. The blonde was truly terrified as she found herself unable to resist the impulse to untie her robe right there. She looked down and saw her hands slowly reaching towards the robe's belt, and even though she knew, somewhere at the back of her head, that this wasn't right, she could not bring herself to stop..

"You want this?" said Kim, her voice less hostile and more relaxed.

The naked girl only nodded her head once, eyes burning into Kim.

"Okay, sure..." Kim nodded back, her hands fiddling with the knotted belt.

As soon as the fluffy robe hit the ground around Kim's pedicured feet, she almost felt as if she were waking up from a dream. The cold wind caressed her exposed skin, sending a chill to the core of Kim. She gasped, looking down at the robe she had just relieved herself from.

"What the fu-"

The rest of Kim's sentence caught in her mouth as she raised her line of sight, coming face to face with a most hideous creature. Kim's heart plummeted, and she opened her mouth to scream, but the monster beat her to it. Its apparent faceless head split open like some sort of gruesome flower, rows upon rows of bloodied teeth lining the inside of the great maw. Out from the depths of its throat issued a blood-curdling screech.

Kim fell into a sudden blackness, like she had fainted. In her head she could hear a girl's soft voice echo,

"Sorry."

4. Stranger Girl

A/N: Hey everyone! So, I know you all are probably sick of the exposition and backstory by now, so this chapter will be getting the ball rolling. Believe me, I hate scene setting, but it has to be done in order to get to the good stuff. Anywho, a huge thanks to everybody who is following this story! I love writing it regardless of reviews and such, but it is always a great feeling when someone else is enjoying your work as well. Thank you!

Recommended listening list:

- 'Need You Tonight' by INXS
- 'Shattered Dreams' by Johnny Hates Jazz
- 'On the Bus' from ST2 OST
- 'This Isn't You' from ST1 OST

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or anything related to it. It is the sole property of the Duffer brothers and Netflix.

Chapter 4: Stranger Girl

"So, party starts at five tomorrow. I expect you to be prepared for lots of pizza and cake and presents. Star Wars should be promptly played at eight on the dot. Have your pajamas and hairspray packed, because you're sleeping over and we'll ease you into D and D with a real simple, straight forward campaign. How does that sound?"

Dustin grinned up at Steve, both of them standing in the driveway to the Henderson residence. It was a quarter to ten, and Dustin was the last of the five munchkins that Steve had to drop off tonight. After tending to a bunch of hyperactive high school freshmen in a movie theatre, Steve was ready to crash. He wished Dustin would just let him go and talk to him about this in the morning.

"It sounds like I've lost control of my social life to a squad of shits."

said Steve, wryly.

"And it was the best thing that could have happened to you," retorted Dustin.

Steve rolled his eyes. "Yeah, I'm sure."

"Anyway, you got all of that?" said Dustin.

"I'll be here tomorrow at five O'clock sharp, with a smile on my face and song in my heart." said Steve.

Dustin sighed exasperatedly. "Don't be a dick, Harrington. I'll keep all of your gifts, I swear."

"Alright, alright, don't get your panties in a bunch. I'll be here." said Steve.

"Five O'clock?" Dustin drilled Steve, backing away up the driveway.

"Five O'clock. Now, get inside, Dipshit!" ordered Steve.

Dustin turned and bounded up the rest of the driveway, to the pathway leading to the front door of his home, calling back to Steve over his shoulder all the while,

"Five O'clock, Harrington, or the presents are mine!"

Steve chuckled, getting into his car. He waited until Dustin had gone into the house and waved to him from the living room window, signaling he was safe, before reversing out of the driveway. The drive home was pretty peaceful, with only a few other cars on the roads through Hawkins. Steve leaned against his door, resting his head on his fist, steering the car with his one hand lazily. He was so ready to strip to his boxers and hit the sack, it wasn't even funny. Yawning widely and blinking back the urge to shut his eyes, Steve distantly noted the radio playing at a low volume. To the overwhelming demand for music by the kids from earlier, Steve had allowed them to turn on his radio, much to his secret dismay. Normally, he would have turned it off by now, but Steve was so zonked, that his focus lay more in keeping from running into a ditch or something.

A good ten miles on, and Steve was past the downtown part of Hawkins, entering the rural outskirts. Rolling easily along a lonely road, Steve let out a cry of fright when from out of the trees up ahead there stepped a person. A girl. She walked into the middle of the road, jutting out her thumb. Steve slammed his foot on the brake. His tires screeched along the asphalt until the car had come to a halt mere feet from her.

Steve barely had a moment to catch his breath, as the girl was making her way rather quickly to his passenger side door. She knocked on the window, looking in at him.

Steve leant over the seat to roll down the window.

"Can I get a ride?" the girl asked immediately.

"Are you okay?" Steve questioned, taking note to the urgency in her voice.

"No. My boyfriend left me stranded a mile or two away from here. He has my car."

Initially, Steve's chivalrous nature kicked in at her words and he invited her into his car without a second thought. The girl thanked him profusely while she all but jumped into the passenger seat.

"So, where do you live?" Steve asked, reaching to turn off the radio.

"I'm not from around here, actually. I'm from out of state," answered the girl, buckling her seatbelt. "My boyfriend and I are both from out of state. We came here to visit a friend of his."

"Oh..." Steve wanted to tell her how shitty that was of him to leave her in a random town in a different state, but refrained, as their business was none of his. "What state?"

"New Jersey."

Steve nodded. "Dang, that's pretty far from here. Were you guys staying at his friend's?"

"Why are you asking me so many questions? Are you a cop or

something?" the girl suddenly snapped.

The atmosphere in the car was now a bit chilly and uncomfortable.

"No, I'm asking questions because I just picked up some random hitch-hiking chick at ten O'clock at night, who was left by her boyfriend and who happens to be from out of state, and I'm wondering where to take her? Jesus." said Steve, rubbing at his brow.

There was a beat between them.

"We were staying at his friend's, on the other side of this town." said the girl at length, her tone even.

Steve looked over at her for a moment.

It was then for the first time he realized that she was dressed in only a fluffy, pink robe and was barefoot. Steve kept stealing concerned sidelong glances at her as he drove back in the direction of town.

"I already came from this way." she said, sounding a little annoyed.

"Well, your friend's house is on the other side of Hawkins, right?" Steve checked with her calmly, though he was starting to feel irked by this girl.

"I can't go back with my boyfriend there. I really don't want to see him after what he did." said the girl.

Steve sighed, slowing to a halt at a four way intersection.

"Okay, where would you like me to take you then? The police?"

"No. Can I come stay with you?"

Steve was stunned at this.

Not to mention a little wary of her intentions now.

"Um, you don't know me..." was all Steve could think to say.

"I might." replied the girl quietly.

As if on cue, the radio came to life with that same God-awful screeching Steve had heard a month prior.

"Son of a bitch!" Steve shrieked, turning the car on a dime into a vacant parking lot.

Slamming on his breaks for the second time that night, Steve parked the car and rounded on the strange girl sitting next to him, infuriated.

"Look, I don't know who you are, or what your deal is, but I'm not stupid, okay?!" said Steve, jabbing a finger at her blank face. "There's something weird going on and I am *NOT* about to deal-"

"*Can you hear me?*" an all too familiar voice rang out of the radio then, cutting him off.

Steve's blood ran cold. He was still looking at the girl, pointing his finger, though it was starting to visibly shake. The blank expression on her face was giving way to a faint smile, her dark eyes glittering. Steve looked at the radio, then back at the girl, lowering his arm.

"You..." he breathed.

The girl inclined her head and the radio spoke,

"Yes."

Steve shook his head, fumbling to get the gear into drive.

"No, no, no, no, no..." he was mumbling to himself in a panic.

Weirdly, Steve felt a sudden calmness overtake him. All the anxiety just seemed to melt away in an instant, leaving the boy in this sort of semi-euphoric state of mind. He no longer had a desire to go knocking on Hopper's door. That could definitely wait-

"*Hey, are you okay?*"

Steve was not scared by the voice in his head, but rather amused. He was then compelled to turn and look over at the strange girl in the passenger seat. She was looking back at him with intense eyes. Steve

only smiled at her.

"I feel great, thanks for asking," answered Steve happily, but his smile was quick to disappear at the sight of blood leaking out from the girl's left nostril. "You're bleeding."

The girl seemed unfazed by his comment, swiping the back of her hand under her nose, leaning back in the seat.

"You'll take me to your home. No police. No questions. We'll talk in the morning, I promise." said the girl with an air of authority.

Steve nodded, his hair flopping in time. "Sounds good to me."

"What's your name?" inquired the girl in a nicer tone after a moment or two.

"Steve," said Steve, flashing her another smile. "What about you?"

The girl eyed him with uncertainty before answering. "Lena."

"Lena? Lena. Okay, yeah, I like that a lot." determined Steve, still smiling like a dope.

The girl, Lena, cocked an eyebrow at him, then sighed and settled back into the seat. Steve drove them back the way they'd came, humming softly and tapping his fingers atop the steering wheel as he did. After a good ten minutes, Steve took a left onto a long, narrow stretch of gravel road that winded through a thick patch of woods. It led them to a huge hidden lake, where a shabby trailer sat on. Steve rolled up to the trailer, parked and shut off the car.

"Home sweet home." said Steve.

The two got out of the car and started up to the front door of the trailer, steps creaking underfoot to the wooden porch that was connected. Steve unlocked the door and gestured for Lena to enter first. As Steve walked in behind her, he put the lights on. The trailer was clean, but pretty bare, with only a worn, patched sofa, rickety rocking chair, a nicked coffee table, and a two-person dining table set off near the kitchen portion of the main living area. A short, dark hallway led to two bedrooms and a bathroom.

"It's not much, but I don't mind it." said Steve, scooting past Lena.

Lena assessed her environment with sharp eyes, stepping lightly across the carpeted floor. She watched Steve make his way over to the refrigerator, and she followed.

"Boy, am I ever hungry. Are you hungry? I can make us a couple of sandwiches-" Steve was saying, his rambling cut short at a small hand on his forearm.

"Go get some rest. It's late. I'm tired. You must be tired too." Lena spoke up to him in a soft, gentle way.

"Yeah..." Steve nodded, setting the deli meat back in the fridge and closing the door. "I am kind of tired. Those kids are hard work..."

Lena wasn't sure who 'those kids' were, but she went along with him, trailing behind him down the hallway into what must have been his bedroom. Steve turned on the light, went to the neatly made bed that sat in the middle of the room, and practically fell into it. As he rolled onto his side, Lena came to stand next to him. Steve gazed up at her with his rich, chocolate eyes. They shone with concern, and a frown appeared on his lips.

"Your nose is bleeding again. Are you okay?" he queried.

Lena sniffed and wiped the blood away casually.

"Yes. Now, close your eyes and sleep. We have a lot to discuss in the morning."

Steve yawned and his eyelids drooped. He snuggled into his pillow.

Lena turned and began to leave, when she heard the boy say ever so faintly.

"Sweet dreams... Lena."

The strange girl stopped momentarily at the doorway, one hand on the light switch.

"You too, Steve."

With Steve fast asleep in his bedroom, Lena investigated the trailer further. From the kitchen, where she scarfed down an entire jar of pickles that was in the fridge, to the bathroom where she got to look at herself for the first time in a very long time.

Lena stood in front of the mirror, studying her features. She brushed her fingers over the gaunt appearance that was not like her at all. She touched at her hair, a tangled disaster. Tears were forming in her sunken, shadowed eyes.

"Monster." she murmured, letting the tears fall freely.

Lena dried her cheeks with the robe's plush sleeves, catching a brief glimpse of the unwanted tattoo on the underside of her forearm.

A new emotion flooded her.

Anger.

Seething anger.

Lena grit her teeth, trying her best not to lash out and destroy the bathroom. She had to behave if she wanted to get this Steve to help her. She couldn't be a monster. She had to try.

For her.

Lena made herself look at the tattoo on her arm fully, even though her heart clenched at its sight.

006 lay there like some wicked reminder of how inhuman she actually was.

Lena fought back a new wave of tears, thinking of how close she was to meeting her dear sister. So close to saving her. It felt like a dream.

Lena closed her eyes tight, breathing in and out gradually, a whisper escaping her lips.

"Eleven."

5. Happy Birthday Part 1

A/N: Hello all! So, I had a LOT planned for this chapter. So much so, that it would have been way too much to fit in one alone, thus leading me to split this guy into a two part. Hope nobody's pissed about this. Honestly, it's for the best. I promise to get the second part up as soon as I can. Also, instead of a recommended listening list, I've decided to just dedicate a song to each chapter that I feel fits it the most. Just an FYI. Anyway, please read and enjoy!

Song of this chapter: 'Loverboy' by Billy Ocean

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or any of its related characters. That property belongs to the Duffer brothers and Netflix.

Chapter 5: Happy Birthday Part 1

"-going to be another mild day with a high around sixty degrees, low of forty, partly cloudy, with a ten to twenty percent chance of rain in the evening. Great day for outdoor work, if you have any-"

Steve slapped his hand down on the alarm clock that was on his bedside table, effectively killing the obnoxiously loud weather report. With a small groan, Steve lifted his head from his pillow just enough to peek at the time on the clock.

7:00 AM

Steve groaned again, burrowing his face back into the pillow.

God, it felt really good to do that after school and work and kids all week long.

He wished he would have remembered to disable the alarm, though. Steve always had a hard time falling back to sleep once he was awake in the morning.

Well, what was the point in throwing off his sleep schedule now?

With an incredible effort, Steve pushed himself out of his pillow. He sat up and swung his legs over the edge of the bed, stretching and yawning. While picking sleep crusties out of his eyes, Steve came to the sudden realization that he was still wearing his clothes from yesterday and had never made his bed down.

Wow, he'd been more tired than he thought.

Hell, he barely recalled the events of last night. It was like those times when he'd gotten drunk off his ass and blacked out.

But, Steve hadn't drank.

The last time he had consumed alcohol had been when... well, since a certain Halloween party...

Steve scratched his head, running both his hands all through his thick hair.

Vague memories gradually started to resurface in his mind as he sat there.

Cindy giving him her number...

Going to the movies with the shitheads...

Dustin being Dustin...

Rising to his feet, Steve headed straight for the bathroom to relieve himself. He entered the bathroom and flicked on the light, but stopped when his eyes were drawn to the most obvious new detail hanging on one of the hooks lining the wall.

A fluffy, pink robe.

"What the fuck...?" Steve mumbled, backing up.

Yeah, that definitely wasn't his.

Alarmed, Steve strode down the hallway and out into the front room of the trailer, where he discovered he had a visitor. He stopped dead in his tracks as the stranger laying comfortably on his couch looked

up from the magazine she was reading and smiled pleasantly.

"Hello, Steve."

Steve gaped at her, baffled to say the least.

"Excuse me, but who the hell are you?" said Steve as calmly as he could will himself, for he was very much perturbed; his eyes squinted in disbelief. "And why are you wearing my clothes?!"

The girl's dark eyes dropped down to the red sweater and basketball shorts that she was wearing, and sighed. "Sorry, I was just borrowing them for the time until I could get my own. I didn't think you would mind..."

"Who are you?!" repeated Steve in a louder, more frantic tone, gesturing his arms broadly at her for emphasis.

"Lena. We met last night, Steve." the girl answered, closing the magazine and tossing it onto the coffee table.

A whirlwind of possible scenarios that could have played out the night before involving a strange girl currently lounging in his fucking clothes on his fucking couch exploded in his mind in that moment.

And not a one of them made even the slightest bit of sense.

Unless... No, it couldn't be... That had been a dream... It had to have been a dream... There's no fucking way...

"Lena..." Steve breathed, letting the name roll slowly off of his tongue, processing it.

She smiled, nodding yes.

"I picked you up?" Steve questioned as he recounted the blurry, distant memories that were rapidly coming into focus now.

Lena nodded again. "Yes."

"That's your bathrobe in there?" Steve indicated the direction of the bathroom with his thumb, starting to get shaky.

"Not exactly..." Lena's gaze averted guiltily.

Steve began to pace between the kitchen and living room, tugging at his hair, distressed as fuck. "You-you talked to me. You were in my-my radio. You were the v-voice! Shit! *Shit!*"

"Steve. Steve, it's okay. Please, Steve-" said Lena gingerly, rising from the couch.

"No! St-stop it! N-nothing about this is *okay!*" Steve ripped across her, pointing an accusatory finger at the girl, his face flushing hot pink. "Who-who the f-fuck are you, Lena?! Wh-why the fuck are you in my home?! Wh-why are-are-are you h-haunting my-my-my car?! *WHO THE FUCK ARE YOU?!*"

The two stood there in his living room, staring each other down for some time. Steve's heavy, shallow breaths the only thing stirring the dead silence. Lena's dark eyes were regarding him with an unreadable emotion, and it only served to anger Steve further. How the fuck dare this girl just stand there and say nothing? Like he was the crazy one here!

"F-fuck this." said Steve.

Lena watched him pivot and march over to the telephone hanging off the wall in the kitchen, her eyes narrowing dangerously.

"What are you doing, Steve?" she questioned, her voice creeping higher.

Steve picked up the phone from the hook roughly. "Calling the police."

"Don't do that." Lena warned, walking towards him.

Steve snorted incredulously. "Yeah, okay, h-how ab-about f-fuck off?!"

Before Steve could even register what was happening, he had hung the phone back up, turned on his heel and was looking Lena in the eyes as she stood there mere inches from him.

There was a droplet of blood beneath her left nostril.

Sweat was beginning to seep out of Steve's pores, his heart pounding in his chest.

"Wh-what-are-you-doing-" Steve managed to say through gritted teeth, wanting to be angry, but something was preventing that in his mind. "You-you-m-my-head-"

"Since you clearly are unable to have a civilized conversation with me, I'm going to have to show you who I am, instead."

Her voice reverberated through his skull, hot and laced with just a hint of displeasure. Steve screwed his eyes shut and opened his mouth to scream at the searing pain that engulfed his head, but nothing came out. He felt two hands press firmly on either side of his throbbing head, and the pain dimmed a little as images - *memories* - that were not his own flashed in front of his mind.

A stark white room. One bed. One pillow. One pathetic blanket.

Nothing else. It was lifeless. Hostile.

"Nine. Nine years of my life were wasted here. Take a good look, Steve."

Steve shivered.

The white room morphed into another. This one was not much different.

It had a table with two chairs. A man sat across the table. He had white hair. A stony face.

Steve didn't feel he liked the man...

"That's Papa. Let's just say he put me to use."

The man, Papa, smiled. It was a cold, reptilian smile trying to appear warm. He was speaking, though Steve could not hear the words coming from his mouth.

The scene once again changed.

It was dark. Like a void.

Particles were flying around in the air.

No. Spores.

Steve knew exactly where he was.

"The other world. Many can't see it. Few can feel it. I lived in it. If Hell is real, then this would be it."

The other world Steve knew to be the Upside Down shifted its landscape. From empty shopping malls, to dead woodland, then...

He was in Hawkins. He was outside the middle school.

Steve could only look on in absolute terror as above the school loomed a shadowy behemoth.

The Mind Flayer.

"The master of masters. Long have I eluded him throughout my travels in the other world, but he has never given up. That is, until another caught his attention..."

The nightmarish creature faded away, and in his place there appeared a face Steve knew well now.

A face he'd grown to care for.

His heart clenched.

El.

"She has an incredible power. He wants it. He needs it. He'll stop at nothing to get it. I know, I've felt him. Heard him. He's searching, trying to find a way back into this world. To her. I can't let that happen. We can't let that happen. If he gets what he wants, she'll be dead. We all will be dead. I'm here to save her. She's my sister, Steve. I have to save her. Will you help me?"

She was pleading with him. She was scared. Real scared. Desperate.

It made Steve scared also. Perhaps more than he'd been in a while. Perhaps since last year when the Gate had been closed.

The Mind Flayer was still lurking.

He was actively trying to get back into their world.

He wanted El.

Steve had known it wasn't over. He just fucking knew it.

Fuck.

As Lena withdrew herself from him, both physically and mentally, she was not entirely surprised when his body collapsed heavily. The girl wrapped her arms around him and eased him as best she could to the floor in a rather sloppily controlled fall. It was certainly not simple, as he was a lanky guy, and she a petite girl.

Knelt at his side, Lena rolled Steve onto his back, brushing some silky locks of hair from his eyes and checking for a pulse at his wrist. It was thumping as it should, to Lena's relief. The girl sat there for a few minutes on the floor with Steve, holding his hand within her own smaller pair. She hadn't caused someone to faint in a long while, and usually it took hours for the person to regain consciousness.

And she couldn't wait that long to get out of this trailer. She needed to go get clothes, supplies and the like. She needed to investigate Hawkins and its inhabitants. She needed to find the place her sister lived. She had a plan and it needed to be set into motion as soon as was possible.

However, she couldn't go out there looking so blatantly out of place.

Lena observed Steve, her mind working.

The conclusion was obvious, though Lena still couldn't help but feel a twinge of guilt.

But what else could she have done?

With a decisive look in her eyes, Lena reached to cup Steve's cheek in

her hand.

"Sorry, but I'm going to need to borrow your face for a bit."

...

Jim Hopper could barely keep his eyes open, and being he was on his fourth cup of coffee within the span of an hour, he had a feeling it wasn't going to be helping him much today. The chief sat in his office bright and early this Saturday morning, trying to sort through both a mound of paperwork and his thoughts on the previous night's mystery case.

It had been just about ten O'clock in the evening when he received the call from the station. Officer Powell had been on duty, and he had an emergency on his hands that called for bigger guns.

Bigger guns meaning Hopper.

Powell made it sound like he'd encountered a murder scene over the phone, and Hopper was in seconds gearing up and sneaking out of the cabin as quietly as he could so that Jane remained in slumberland for the time. When Hopper arrived at the Jones' residence, he was met by the raving blonde daughter of the household and her obviously annoyed partner, who Hopper recognized as Billy Hargrove. The kid hadn't changed much since last Hopper seen him, which was well over a few months ago. Hargrove had clearly avoided the wider public of Hawkins since his violent encounter with Steve, as he knew Hopper was always about and would not hesitate to throw his ass back in a cell for even a minor offense.

While Kim Jones blabbered on hysterically and Billy Hargrove barked at her to shut up, Officer Powell explained the situation to Hopper.

It was a weird one that honestly made the chief on edge. And Hopper hadn't felt on edge since before Jane had closed the Gate.

And he had prayed, hoped and wanted to expect to never have to feel that way ever again.

Alas, Hopper was and always will be a cursed man.

From what Hopper could gather from Powell, Kim had gone outside to get some beer from Hargrove's car (a detail Hopper was willing to overlook in light of the odd scenario), and whilst doing so, a naked girl had approached her. This served to hook Hopper's attention, and the further the story progressed, the more chilling it became. Kim was certain the girl had used some 'freaky mind powers' on her to take her robe off, as the blonde had done so without really caring too much. She described it like being high or some shit. When the high had ended, Kim was robeless and faced with what she could only call some sort of monster. After that, the story faded and she was unable to procure any other memories. Not long following the encounter, Hargrove went out to see what was taking the girl so long, only to find her passed out on the front lawn, not an article of clothing on her body.

"Sounds like the Russians are back in town." Powell had muttered to Hopper with a smirk.

Ha, if only.

After much talking and reassuring from both policemen, Kim was mollified enough to leave her with Hargrove quietly for the night. Of course, by that time it was knocking on three O'clock in the morning and Hopper had to hurry home to catch a few more hours of shuteye before going back to work in another few hours.

And so here he sat, on three hours of sleep, reading Kim's report for the seventh time that morning.

It still bewildered him.

Although the girl appeared truthful and scared out of her wits, Hopper couldn't rule out the possibility of a drunk prank between her and the Hargrove boy. Seriously, what were the odds of another telekinetic girl and Demogorgon running around Hawkins? Sure, it did unnerve him a bit, but Hopper knew better than to just jump right into conclusions. Especially where young, alcoholic adults were concerned.

"Chief?"

"Yeah?" Hopper looked up from the report in his hands.

"Mrs. Filberg just brought by a whole box of assorted bagels with cream cheese. Just wanted to let you know, in case you were hungry." said Flo, hovering in the doorway to his office.

"M'kay, thanks, Flo." said Hopper, going back to milling through the paperwork in front of him.

Flo didn't move, hands on her hips, arching an eyebrow at him. "You never ate breakfast this morning. You need to eat something, Hop."

"Look, Flo, if you want me to eat so bad just bring a bagel in here. I'm busy as shit right now, if you didn't see all these reports." said Hopper, gesturing to the mess of papers on the desk.

"Fine," said Flo, turning to go, but then halting and looking back at him. "Aren't you supposed to be helping with remodeling the Byers' home this weekend?"

Hopper raised his line of sight to his faithful secretary, mouth falling open in a dawning of recollection.

"Yeah... Shit."

Flo pursed her lips and shook her head at him, shutting his door behind her.

Hopper leaned back in his chair, stretching his arms out over his head. He cursed under his breath as he set back to organizing the paperwork, hoping to be done at least by nine this morning. He just wished he could rip up Kim Jones' stupid report and forget it ever happened. Everything was going so well in his life; Jane was close to her freedom, Joyce had accepted an offer to get dinner with him next Friday, he was twenty pounds lighter and still losing.

He didn't want to even consider the possibility that shit was stirring again in his little town. Not now. Not tomorrow. Not ever.

With a growl, Hopper picked up Kim's report for what felt like the hundredth time that day, barely spared it a glance before crumpling it and throwing it into a drawer on his desk.

...

"Thank you and please come again!"

Joyce Byers handed the paper bag filled with balls of yarn to the elderly lady across the counter, a sunny smile playing on her lips. Once the woman had shuffled outside, Joyce let out a long sigh, flopping her body upon the counter. Usually Joyce was never one to complain or mope about having to work on a Saturday, but damn, today was just not her day. She wasn't sure if it had more to do with the oncoming cold she was fighting or the fact that she would be seeing Hopper later.

Either way she felt exhausted.

Although she appreciated the extra amount of attention from the chief, it was also making her a little overwhelmed. Hopper and her went way back, but it had always been an easy-going friendship. Now-well, okay, long before now in all actuality-Joyce admitted her feelings towards the man had grown quite a bit over the past couple of years, and so had his apparently, because he was taking her to dinner next Friday.

Joyce tried to be happy, but honestly she was petrified. This was a pretty big step in the intimate direction and Joyce could not stop from thinking about her string of misfortunes in the romance department. The last thing she wanted was for Hopper to end up dead or hating her.

At the telltale tinkling bell of a new customer entering the store, Joyce leapt to attention in an instant, swiping the wrinkles out of her uniform.

"Hello! Welcome to-oh, hey, Steve!" Joyce greeted, relief evident in her voice.

Steve took a few steps into the store, halted and looked at her like a deer in headlights.

"Hello..." he replied after an oddly long pause.

Joyce smiled at him. "Did Hopper send you on more shopping

errands?"

Steve shrugged. "No, I'm just... I'm just looking for food."

"Okay, well, you know where to find it." said Joyce, kindly.

"Okay... Yeah, I do. Of course." said Steve, though it seemed more to himself.

Joyce watched the boy as he disappeared down one of the many aisles of the convenient store, a mystified expression forming on her features. Joyce had only recently gotten to know Steve, but she was certain that there was something off about him. Particularly where his hair was concerned. Joyce was aware of the fact that Steve maintained his hair well, and so seeing it so flat was somewhat jarring. It wasn't long before Steve returned to the front, arms literally filled with jars of pickles.

Joyce's jaw slackened.

Steve came to stop at her register, carefully setting the jars down on the counter.

"Wow, I had no idea you were crazy for pickles!" laughed Joyce, eyes wide.

"They're delicious." said Steve simply, sticking his hands in his jeans' pockets.

"Yeah, I remember craving them when I was pregnant with Jonathan," said Joyce wistfully, scanning one jar of pickles eight times. "Can't stand the sight of them now. Funny how that works."

Steve nodded, giving a slight smile. "Yeah."

Joyce gave him the total, bagging the jars as he fished for his wallet. Just as Steve was about to hand over the money, Joyce gasped. Steve started, his eyes bugging wildly.

"I just remembered that it's your birthday today!" said Joyce, slapping her hands down on the counter. "Happy birthday, Steve!"

Steve's eyebrows rose momentarily, before he put on a weak smile.

"Thank you."

"Please tell me you're doing something fun for yourself? Hopper better not be making you work on my house tonight." said Joyce.

"I'm... hanging with the kids." said Steve stiffly.

Joyce gave him a look, her brow furrowing. "Oh, of course, that's all Will has been talking about for the past three weeks. He's so excited. It's so nice of you to do this for him-for all of them! It means so much, I hope you know that."

Steve opened his mouth, then closed it, then opened it again. Finally he just pinned his lips and nodded curtly at her. With a quiet 'thank you', Steve grabbed the bag of pickle jars and made quickly for the door.

"See you later, Hon!" Joyce called after his back, her face painted in motherly concern.

Yes, something was definitely off about that boy today...

And was his nose bleeding...?

6. Happy Birthday Part 2

A/N: Goodness me, hello, hello, hello! It's been WAY too long since the last update, I'm sorry you guys. Life got busy and the like, but I love this story (and Steve), so even if I take forever to post, please know that I don't plan on abandoning it. Hope this turned out okay, I had to re-read my previous chapters to get back into focus. Anyway, I'm currently working on chapter 7, so hopefully I'll have that one up by next week some time. Okay, I'm done blabbering. Enjoy!

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or any of its related characters. That property belongs to the Duffer brothers and Netflix.

Recommended chapter song: Stand Or Fall by the Fixx

Chapter 6: Happy Birthday Part 2

The distant howls brought on a new, deep chill even in the already frigid night air. Everywhere was nowhere. Dread was the feeling. It was curled tight in the chest, on the verge of leaping out in a strike, like some sort of viper. There was the shadow. Immense. Hideous. Silent malice emanating from it like radio waves. It was on the hunt, seemingly having caught a scent. So angry, yet so eager-

"Dustin!"

Dustin sat bolt upright with a wild, hoarse cry. He gripped at his chest, gasping for a breath. He could feel himself drenched in sweat.

"Dusty! Dusty, Sweetie, it's okay! It's me! Momma! I'm here."

Dustin blinked a few times. He found himself focusing better on the figure sat before him on the bed, a flood of relief washing through him as her gentle hands cupped his face.

Miss Henderson had wide, worried eyes. "Dusty, was that... another nightmare?"

Dustin tried to wet his lips, but his mouth was as dry as the Sahara

desert.

"Yes, but I'm okay. It was a normal type of nightmare, so no worries, Mom." he said, his voice broken and scratchy.

"Oh, Honey, this is the fifth time in the last couple of weeks. Don't you think it's time to maybe see a doctor or-"

"No, Mom!" Dustin cut across her sharply, taking her hands and bringing them down to rest between the both of them. "They're just stupid dreams. I'm absolutely fine."

"Dustin, please, you're shaken by these dreams. I can tell," said Miss Henderson softly, stroking her thumb over his hand. "Honey, there's no shame in seeking help. You don't have to keep living like this."

"It's just a bout, Mom. It'll go away soon, just like last time." said Dustin.

"And what if you get another bout in a month or two? What if it's worse? It's not normal, Sweetie pie." countered Miss Henderson, her eyes shining with a hint of wetness.

"Mom."

"Dusty."

Dustin could barely look into his mother's kind, tearful eyes for fear his mask may fall and he would start crying also. He wished he could sometimes, but Dustin knew his mother didn't need that. He took a steadying breath, forcing himself to get a grip.

"Mom, I swear to God and on my life that I am completely okay. They're dumb nightmares, probably caused from puberty or something. You know, I *am* fourteen, and all of the hormones and stuff..." said Dustin, waving his hands around.

"Yes, of course, I know this is a big time for change in your body. I get that. It's just, I've never heard of nightmares or-" Miss Henderson was saying before Dustin interrupted her yet again.

"Mom, you need to stop worrying about this! I. Am. FINE. Okay?"

Miss Henderson bit her lip, turning her gaze down to the wrinkled bed coverings.

"Why were you in my room anyway?" wondered Dustin just then.

"Well, I was going to feed Tews her breakfast, but the food bin was empty. You told me you and Steve were going to pick up some food from the market on the way home last night, so I came to ask if you had." said Miss Henderson.

"Shit!" Dustin slapped his hand to his forehead. "We did, Mom, but I totally forgot about it by the time we got home. It's still in the back of Steve's car."

"Oh, well, he'll be over later, right? I can just give Tews some tuna until then." said Miss Henderson, rising from the bed.

Dustin nodded. "Yeah, okay. Sorry, Mom."

"Dusty, don't you dare say sorry. I love you so much, Sweetheart," said Miss Henderson, bending over to kiss the top of his curly head. "If you're able to, why don't you go back to sleep for a bit? First week of high school is always tiring."

Dustin glanced at his clock on the bedside table, seeing it was almost nine.

"Nah, I'm getting up I think." he said.

Miss Henderson gave him a long look. "Okay, Honey. I made some toast and scrambled eggs. They should still be pretty warm."

"Sounds delicious!" exclaimed Dustin with a big smile.

"They are! Okay, well, I'll let you get dressed. See you in a second."

When Miss Henderson had left, Dustin threw his covers off and rolled out of bed. Running straight for the walkie that lay beside his pet tortoise Yertle's tank, Dustin snatched it up and made sure he was on the correct station before yelling into the mouthpiece,

"Happy Birthday, Harrington! Ready to party it up tonight?!"

Dustin awaited the inevitable dry reply from Steve.

But when a few silent seconds turned into a full minute, Dustin figured he'd give it another go.

"Hello?! Are you really still sleeping? Stop being a slug, Steve!"

Still there was silence. Dustin frowned down at the walkie.

"Okay, well, I guess I'll try you in a bit when you've woken up. Dusty out." Dustin spoke once more into the walkie, deflated.

Walking into the kitchen a few minutes later, dressed in classic Dustin-style attire, Dustin took a seat at the dining table where a plate of reheated eggs and toast sat with a cold glass of orange juice alongside. His mother was on the telephone as she went about cleaning after her cooking mess, Tews mewing at her feet. Dustin dug into the breakfast with less vigor than he should have, his thoughts centered on the plans of the day and willing himself to forget that stupid nightmare. It was pretty hard though this time for some reason.

Thinking about it made him so uneasy that he momentarily regretted not mentioning anything to his friends. Dustin shook his head at his plate, finishing the last bit of toast. He was letting it get to him and it had to stop. He gulped down the juice, gathered the empty dishes and carried them over to the sink to clean them.

"Oh, Dusty, you don't have to do that!" said Miss Henderson, hanging the phone up.

"Mom, relax, please!" ordered Dustin exasperatedly, rinsing his plate. "I'm totally capable of cleaning up my shit."

"I know, I know." said Miss Henderson, bending and scooping Tews into her arms.

Once the dishes were done, Dustin picked up the telephone and dialed Steve's number in a motion so natural it had to have occurred countless times beforehand. While Miss Henderson strolled away with Tews, cooing to and rocking the cat, Dustin paced the kitchen as the ringing stretched on for Steve's side of the line.

"Son of a bitch, Harrington! Answer. Your. Phone!" the boy hollered into the receiver when it was time to leave a message.

Dustin hung the phone up again, flying past his mother and down the hallway to his bedroom. He could hear her calling after him with concern, but Dustin was too focused on the fact that his friend may have been in trouble to care much about it. He grabbed his walkie and backpack, then raced back down the hall, across the living room and to the front door.

"Dustin?! What-where are you going?!" Miss Henderson inquired with alarm.

"Steve's! I'll be back in a bit!" said Dustin breathlessly, hurrying out the door.

"All done? Took you long enough, Chief."

With thoughts abuzz in his mind worse than hours before, Hopper barely heard Officer Callahan as he emerged from his office. The brooding police chief rubbed at his left eyebrow, walking over to retrieve his jacket from the coatrack.

"Hey, so Chief, if we get any more word on magical Russian girls, is the protocol to contact you first?" said Powell, jokingly.

Callahan snickered into his coffee.

"Yes." said Hopper.

Both deputies blinked in surprise at their superior.

"Weird shit is my expertise. Anything else-" Hopper shrugged on the jacket and zipped it up. "You two can handle it. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have a house to paint."

"Have fun." said Flo flatly, scribbling down some sort of to-do list.

"Absolutely." replied Hopper.

He snatched the last bagel from the box on her desk as he passed her

on the way out the door.

Outside the day was overcast, but held no Autumn crispness in the air just yet. Hopper got into his blazer, revved it up and departed within seconds from the station. Driving along and munching on the bagel, Hopper wondered if it would hurt to take Jane over to the Byers with him today. He quickly reprimanded himself on the thought, though. Jane was nearly there. Just a teensy but longer, and she would be able to go to school, hang at the mall, go bowling-all under his heavy supervision, of course. No use in jeopardizing it for her now.

On the way back to the cabin to make a check on Jane, Hopper drove through downtown Hawkins, and everything was pretty normal from what he could see. Hopefully it stayed this way.

There went that creeping feeling again... Hopper shook his head, cursing at himself.

Stopped at a red light, Hopper adjusted his radio station and happened to look out of his window just in time to see Steve Harrington making his way down the sidewalk with shopping bags in each hand. Hopper rolled down his window and shouted at him. Steve jumped around, dropping his bags and looking frightened for his life. Hopper chuckled, then turned his car about when the light changed to green. He parked next to the sidewalk and beckoned Steve. The young man approached in a strange fashion, like he was very uncertain about something.

"Hey, early Christmas shopping?" said Hopper, pointing at the bags.

"Sure." said Steve, smiling weirdly.

"Yeah... So, what time should I expect you to be at the Byers'?" queried Hopper.

Steve gave Hopper a dumbfounded look, but swiftly recovered with a startling hard face, speaking in a serious tone- "It's my birthday. The kids are having a party planned."

Hopper's brow rose. "Your birthday? Shit, sorry, Kid, I didn't realize.

The rugrats are throwing you a party, huh?"

"Yes. I, well, I have to go. Bye." said Steve, and immediately started walking again.

"Hey!" Hopper called at his back.

Steve halted and looked around, frowning.

"You okay, Kid?" wondered Hopper, worry lines appearing on his forehead.

Steve looked at him for a few moments before nodding and turning away. Hopper watched the boy shuffle down the sidewalk in a hurry, nibbling his lip. There was something off about him and Hopper didn't like it at all. He was about to get out of the blazer and go after the teen, when a familiar beeping transmitted through his radio.

'Where. Are. You?'

"Jane." Hopper sighed to himself.

Making a mental note to talk to Steve later, Hopper checked his mirror before pulling away from the sidewalk and back into traffic.

Dirt was flying behind Dustin as he sped on his bike down the desolate road that led to Hopper's trailer where Steve presently lived, swearing under his heavy breaths all the while. When he eventually reached his destination, Dustin hopped off his bike, leaving it to fall in the gravel driveway, and pounded up the rickety steps to the front door.

"Hey, Asshole?!" bellowed Dustin, bursting through the door. "Why the hell-Steve?"

Dustin took in the sight of his friend sprawled out on the sofa, head lolling, unmoving.

His heart dropped.

"STEVE!"

He flung off his backpack and rushed over to Steve's side, trying to calm himself as he instantly went to search for a pulse, fearing the worst.

"Oh God, oh God, oh God..." breathed Dustin.

With shaking hands, the boy adjusted Steve's head and felt for the spot that Hopper had taught him to in moments like these. It was pertinent in regards to Steve's condition.

Dustin's heart-racing panic dissolved into tearful relief within seconds as his fingers felt the wonderful, rhythmic thump beneath them.

"Son of a bitch, Harrington..." said Dustin.

Sliding down to sit on the floor beside the sofa, Dustin leaned his head back and groaned at the ceiling. It only then occurred to Dustin that Steve was sleeping. Sleeping the whole time. Dustin suddenly felt bad for assuming something so much darker. He knew the minute Steve found out he'd shake his head and chide the younger boy for being a paranoid freak.

Dustin turned to look at the deeply slumbering Steve again, his brow furrowing.

"Hey! I think it's time you woke up, Farah Fawcett!" said Dustin, giving Steve a shove. "Come on, Man, you're drooling-"

The sound of the front door clicking and creaking open made Dustin whip around. For the briefest of moments he half-expected to see Hopper stepping in, but that expectation was swiftly squashed when his eyes met the chocolate brown ones of Steve Harrington.

Steve stood stock still with shopping bags in hand, his hair a mess and clothes mismatched. Dustin gaped and his eyes widened, looking between the two Steves with utter bemusement. The Steve at the door slowly lowered the bags to the floor, keeping his eyes locked on Dustin. After he'd done so, he cautiously took a step towards the younger boy.

"Hi, you must be very confused right now-" began the disheveled Steve.

"What the fuck?!" Dustin hollered over him, scrambling to his feet.

Dustin had not even the slightest clue of what the hell was happening right now. He'd seen vans thrown in the air by telepathic girls, one of his close friends possessed by an inter-dimensional demon and even owned a faceless monster for a time, but none of that caused the magnitude of chills that ran up his spine at the peculiarity of this scene.

The second Steve was moving closer, trying to placate Dustin, though the boy wouldn't have it. "Please, just-"

"Doppelgänger!" screamed Dustin.

The boy sprung to his feet, made a grab for the glass ash tray on the coffee table and held it threateningly above his head. The second Steve halted, his eyes drawn to the potential weapon.

"GET OUT!" roared Dustin with all of his might.

The second Steve did not move, but he did look a bit irritated.

"I'm not going to hurt you, or him." he said.

Dustin was about to retort, when there came a low moan from behind him.

"What's going on?"

Dustin turned and was delighted to see Steve coming around.

"Hey, Buddy! Great timing!" said Dustin, unable to hide his anxiety. "We've got a visitor I might need help with."

Steve sat up a bit, blinking slowly at the boy. "Dustin? What are you-"

"Steve, tell this boy I mean no harm."

Both Steve and Dustin looked to the owner of the voice. Where second-Steve had been standing mere seconds ago, now stood a petite woman with a wild mane of dark curly hair. Dustin was beyond bewildered. Steve took a moment before the events of the morning

came speeding back to mind, his face becoming white as a sheet.

"Steve, who-what-h-how?!" Dustin could not find the words, he was starting to freak even more than before.

"My name is Lena. I'm... I'm a friend. I swear, I will not lay a finger on either of you, so please, calm yourself!"

Dustin, still unable to absorb the bizarre situation at hand, blinked twice at her, jaw slack. Suddenly he felt a hand seize his shirt roughly. Dustin turned back to Steve, who was gripping at Dustin, an odd look of fright glinting in his wild eyes. Steve gave a strange gurgled utterance before his frightful eyes rolled back in his head.

"STEVE!" cried Dustin.

Dustin hurried to shove the coffee table away and dragged Steve down off the sofa and onto the floor. As the convulsions started, Dustin just managed to get the older boy propped on his side and began timing the event on his wristwatch, just as Hopper had instructed. From across the room, Lena observed the scene with a horrified expression, unsure of what to say or do. It was awful, the noises Steve made while his body jerked involuntarily. Dustin was splitting his attention between his watch and Steve, chewing his lip in blatant concern. Eventually, after what seemed like a good hour (really only a minute), Steve became limp. Dustin checked him, seen he was breathing relatively normal, wiped away the little bit of foamy spit that had formed at the corner of Steve's mouth, and then heaved a shaky sigh.

"Son of a bitch..."

Lena finally dared to breathe again, her wide eyes finding Dustin's. They studied one another without a word for a few seconds, then Lena spoke.

"What's wrong with him?" her voice was hushed.

Dustin's brow furrowed. "You've never seen a seizure before?"

"Does this happen often to him?" questioned Lena, crossing her arms.

"No. This was..." Dustin trailed off, shook his head a bit and put on a hard tone. "Shit, why are we even having this conversation?! You say your name's Lena and that you're a friend of Steve's? He's never mentioned you. And-and what the hell was that doppelgänger stuff? What-who are you exactly?!"

Lena was wary, but this boy clearly was close to Steve. Perhaps even one of the 'kids' he mentioned?

"I never got your name." she said pointedly.

"Dustin. Now either tell me who you are or I call Hopper!" answered Dustin.

Lena wasn't sure what or who Hopper was, but it must've been important to him. Gesturing towards the far end of the sofa, Lena wondered if she could take a seat. Dustin nodded. The girl sat and laid her hands in her lap, sighing wearily.

"Well, I hope you don't mind long stories, Dustin."